

THE MENASHA CITY HALL-FIRE STATION
124 Main Street
Menasha
Winnebago County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI-306

HABS
WIS,
70-MENA,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P. O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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MENASHA CITY HALL-FIRE STATION

LOCATION: 124 MAIN STREET; MENASHA, WINNEBAGO COUNTY, WISCONSIN;
LOT 8 OF BLOCK 7, ORIGINAL PLAT

PRESENT OWNER: City of Menasha; 140 Main Street;
Menasha, Wisconsin 54952

PRESENT OCCUPANT: Vacant

PRESENT USE: Awaiting demolition due to extensive deterioration to
roof and rear and inability to market for adaptive re-
use. Condemnation due to structural hazard is eminent.

SIGNIFICANCE: The significance of the Menasha City Hall is threefold:
first, it is the oldest city hall still standing in the
Fox River Valley and was one of the first constructed;
second, it was designed by noted Appleton architect,
Charles Hove and is closely associated with the mayoralty
of industrialist and civic leader, P. V. Lawson, Jr.; and
third, it's construction marks a turning point in the his-
tory of Menasha's city government and community identity.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. PHYSICAL HISTORY

1. Date of Erection: 1885¹
2. Architect: Charles Hove²
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: City of Menasha
4. Builders, Contractors, Suppliers: Unknown

5. Original plans and construction: Not known to be extant
6. Alteration and Additions: On the south side of the main mass is the front entry at the base of the tower. It consists of a single paneled door with a large pane of glass and is surmounted by a double-paneled transom. The door is recessed from its original position at the front of a simulated gabled entryway. In addition to moving the door, the entryway has been reduced by orange glazed bricks, an alteration which was part of a 1935 Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration project.³ The original door was campher-cut with solid panels, surmounted by a transom, and reached by two steps. Extending slightly from the south side, dividing the front facade, is a square tower truncated at the roofline. The upper twenty feet of the tower were removed in 1933; a small addition to the east side of the rear wing is undated.⁴ Flanking the tower are two garage entries. These were lowered and widened in 1961 using pink brick, but each retains the upper portion of the original headmold segmental arches, including limestone extrados, skewbacks, and keystones.⁵ The original double doors were campher-cut with herringbone panels, set with frosted glass at the top, and reached by graded ramps.

On the west side of the main mass, there are two more entries: a garage entry on the first floor and a fire exit on the second. The garage entry has a multi-paneled transom and a steel lintel while the fire exit has a metal-covered door and a metal fire escape. Both doors were added at an unknown date.

The rear wing has two entries: one on the west side and one on

the north. The west side entry consists of a single paneled door with a large pane of glass; it and the surrounding windows are part of an alteration that followed the relocation of the police department in 1924.⁶ The north side entry is a single paneled door leading into the east side addition to the rear wing.

In the main mass, there are four windows on the first floor: one large plate glass and two double-hung, multi-paned on the west side, and one double-hung, multi-paned on the north. The plate glass window on the lower west wall is an undated addition.

On the second floor, there are seventeen windows: nine on the south side, two each on the east and west, and four on the north. On the south side, there are two four-window groupings flanking the tower and one window in the tower itself. All have limestone sills and lintels; all are enclosed with glass bricks set with two single-paned casements each. Originally, the window groupings had double-hung, single-paned sash; the tower window was also double-hung, but with a ring of panes around the upper sash.

Above the second floor tower window, is one remaining tower slit set with glass and a limestone sill. Another similar window above has been closed with brick.

On the rear wing, there are seven windows. On the west side are two sets of paired windows with double-hung, single-paned sash. These have tilted brick sills and iron lintels and are part of a remodeling concurrent with the entry they flank. Originally there was one entry and two windows with bars: the segmental arches indicating their positions remain. On the north side is another set of paired double-hung,

single-paned replacement windows and one double-hung, multi-paned window original to the east addition. Both have tilted brick sills.

Above the stepped curtain wall in the main mass are five chimneys, two on the west side and three on the east. Those on the east side have been taken down to the curtain wall and one on the west side has had its pot removed. The remaining chimney, still in use, was rebuilt with pink brick at an unknown date.

All decorative features are found on the south side. Above the headmold arches and the gabled entryway is a corbeled table of the same materials, the limestone forming the second floor window sills. Between these corbeled courses is a limestone tablet marked, "City Hall". The lintels of the second floor windows form yet another string course, above which are two relieving blind segmental arches with limestone extrados, voussoirs, skewbacks, and keystones. These arches, blinded by cutwork brick, surmount the two four-window groupings. Cutwork slits flank either end of the building between the sill and lintel string courses.

Flanking the tower at the roofline is a pent roof of metal supported by reeded brackets on a raked friezeboard. Cabled molding runs along the bottom of this cornice, and below this are pointed lobes with pellet ornaments at the end of each bracket. Centered in the pent roof on either side of the tower is a pedimented crown with flabelliform carvings. A pedimented brick crown finishes the truncated tower.

Additional decorative features have disappeared over time. Metal Greek crestings ran along the top of the pent roof and each

carved crown was surmounted by an ornate finial. The square bell tower was the main decorative feature, rising above the present roofline to a belvedere with decorative ironwork. Above this the tower corbeled out, immitating medieval machicolations at each corner, and was set with four clocks. The roof of the tower was a pavilion roof with four gables, one over each clock. The roofing was diamond-patterned slate, and each gable was surmounted by an ornate finial.⁷

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Beginning with Oshkosh in 1853 and ending with Onro in 1944, nine cities have incorporated along the historic waterway of the Fox River Valley. Eight of these communities have constructed buildings specifically intended to house city government.

The City Hall in Menasha was also one of the first. In October of 1885, Menasha and Kaukauna began construction of their city halls.⁸ Both were a combination engine house, "lockup", and council chamber. The Menasha City Hall, however, included a clerk's office, a treasurer's office, and a committee meeting room.

The Menasha City Hall was constructed during a period of local economic growth. In 1881 new owners aggressively promoted the redevelopment of the Menasha water power and utilized the proceeds to construct a second power canal. Industry expanded rapidly: the Whiting Paper Company was established in 1882, the Gilbert Paper Company in 1887, and the Howard Paper Company, the Strange Pail Company, and the Menasha Wood Split Pulley Company in 1888. By 1890, local newspapers reported statistics that showed Menasha

leading the state in manufacturing improvements per capita, exceeded only by Milwaukee in terms of actual expenditures. During these growth years, the population expanded from 3,144 to 4,581 and Upper Main Street assumed the general appearance of an urban streetscape.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. GENERAL STATEMENT

1. Architectural character: The Menasha City Hall is a two-story rectangular building with a large one-story rear wing. The foundations are rock-faced, ashlar limestone and the walls are yellow brick with a stretcher bond. The main mass and rear wing have shed roofs hidden by curtain walls: stepped on the east and west sides of the main mass, and straight on the west side of the rear wing. Extending slightly from the south side, dividing the front facade, was a square tower truncated at the roofline. The upper twenty feet of the tower were removed in 1933.

The architect, Charles Hove, included elements of Victorian Gothic: a gabled entry, stone belt coursings, and relieving arches. Here and there were touches of Second Empire: a false mansard roof, raked frieze-boards, and twisted rope moldings. Turning from precedent, Hove toyed with the upcoming Classic Revival: Greek crestings, urn-like finials, and heavily carved pediments. Over all was a slender Queen Anne tower embellished with wrought iron, cutwork brick, and diamond-patterned slate shinglework.

2. Condition of fabric: fair.

B. DESCRIPTION OF EXTERIOR

1. Overall Dimensions: The approximate building dimensions are 46' x 95'.
2. Foundation: The foundation is rock-faced ashlar limestone.
3. Walls: The walls are yellow brick with a stretcher bond.
4. Structural system: Brick-masonry.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: None.
6. Chimneys: Above the stepped curtain wall in the main mass are five chimneys, two on the west side and three on the east. Those on the east side have been taken down to the curtain wall, and one on the west side has had its pot removed. The remaining chimney still in use was rebuilt with pink brick at an unknown date.
7. Openings: There are seven entries to the building: five in the main mass and two in the rear wing. Three are contemporary overhead garage doors with multipaned windows.

On the south side of the main mass is the front entry at the base of the tower. It consists of a single paneled door with a large pane of glass and is surmounted by a double-paned transom. The door is recessed from its original position at the front of a simulated gabled entryway. The gable is outlined by incised limestone and extends beyond the width of the tower; the date "1885" is inscribed at its apex. Directly over the original entry is a stilted segmental arch with limestone extrados. The arch is connected to the gable by limestone architraves which appear to be supported by paired brick columns, an effect created by corbels, cutwork, and limestone trimmed pedestals. In addition to moving the door, the entryway has been reduced by orange glazed bricks, an alteration which was part of a 1935 Wisconsin Emergency

Relief Administration project.⁹ The original door was campher-cut with solid panels, surmounted by a transom, and reached by two steps.

Flanking the tower are two garage entries. These were lowered and widened in 1961, using pink brick, but each retains the upper portion of the original headmold segmental arches, including limestone extrados, skewbacks, and keystones.¹⁰ The original double doors were campher-cut with herringbone panels, set with frosted glass at the top, and reached by graded ramps.

On the west side of the main mass there are two more entries: a garage entry on the first floor and a fire exit on the second. The garage entry has a multi-paned transom and a steel lintel while the fire exit has a metal-covered door and a metal fire escape. Both doors were added at an unknown date.

The rear wing has two entries: one on the west side and one on the north. The west side entry consists of a single paneled door with a large pane of glass. It and the surrounding windows are part of an alteration that followed the relocation of the police department in 1924.¹¹ The north side entry is a single paneled door leading into the east side addition to the rear wing.

In addition to the seven entries, there are twenty-two windows in the main mass and seven in the rear wing.

In the main mass, there are four windows on the first floor: one large plate glass and two double-hung, multi-paned on the west side, and one double-hung, multi-paned on the north. The plate glass window is an undated addition; all have segmental arches and limestone

sills.

On the second floor there are seventeen windows: nine on the south side, two each on the east and west, and four on the north. On the south side there are two four-window groupings flanking the tower and one window in the tower itself. All have limestone sills and lintels; all are closed with glass bricks set with two single-paned casements each. Originally the window groupings had double-hung, single-paned sash; the tower window was also double-hung, but with a ring of panes around the upper sash. All others on the second floor are double-hung, single-paned windows with segmental arches and limestone sills; the two on the east side have shutter hardware.

Above the second floor tower window is one remaining tower slit set with glass and a limestone sill. Another similar window above has been closed with brick.

On the rear wing there are seven windows. On the west side are two sets of paired windows with double-hung, single-paned sash. These have tilted brick sills and iron lintels and are part of a remodeling concurrent with the entry they flank. Originally there was one entry and two windows with bars; the segmental arches indicating their positions remain. On the north side is another set of paired double-hung, single-paned replacement windows and one double-hung, multi-paned window original to the east addition. Both have tilted brick sills.

8. Roof: The main mass and rear wing roof form is shed hidden by curtain walls stepped on the east and west sides of the main mass

and straight out on the rear wing.

C. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR

1. Floor Plans: Except for the rear wing and the stairway location, the original open area has been retained on the first floor. The stairway to the second floor was moved in the early 1940's from the center entrance to the east wall. The first floor area is open in the main mass and the rear wing is now divided into office partitions. This area once housed the jail lock-up and the horse stables for the fire wagon. Most all original features of the interior have been removed.

The second floor council chambers on the south end remain unchanged. The treasurer's office (east) and the stairway hall (center) were exchanged when the stairway was relocated. The clerk's office (west), committee room (north), and vault (northwest) are unchanged.

2. Stairways: The stair case to the second floor is single flight and enclosed. The tread, risers and handrails are wooden.
3. Flooring: The second floor is hardwood and subsequently covered with tile. The first floor was originally wood, but has been replaced with re-inforced concrete in the early 1940's. Date unknown.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The first floor wall and ceiling consists primarily of beaded paneling. The remainder of the interior is lath and plaster with wainscoting.
5. Openings: Doorways and windows are similar in size and proportion excepting the entry to the council chambers which contains two double-door arches. The interior doors are not existing.

6. Interior Trim: Door and window trim appears to be original oak as does the remaining wainscotting on the second floor. All have been painted over.
7. Hardware: Original hardware has all been removed or replaced except for hinge plates on doors.
8. Mechanical Equipment: All original heating and electrical systems and fixtures are non-existent. The plumbing system has had numerous alterations.

D. SITE

1. General Setting and Orientation: The Menasha City Hall is located on the western end of the central business district. Situated on a small lot of approximately 50' x 130', it overlooks the U.S. Government Canal.
2. Historic Landscaping Design: Since the building occupies nearly all of the lot, there are no landscape features associated with the structure.
3. Outbuildings: No outbuildings are extant.

PART III SOURCES OF PROJECT INFORMATION

A. ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

1. None available.

B. EARLY VIEWS

1. Augustine, C. F., "Semi-Centennial Edition of the Menasha Press". Menasha Press, 1898. Menasha, Wisconsin,

C. INTERVIEWS

1. None available

D. BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Adams, Peter James; The Menasha City Hall/Fire Station Nomination National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination form. Prepared 1980.
2. Adams, Peter James. Menasha Intensive Survey Report. Private, 1986. Neenah, Wisconsin.
3. Augustin, C. F., "Semi-Centennial Edition of the Menasha Press." Menasha Press, 1898. Menasha, Wisconsin.

E. LIKELY SOURCES NOT YET INVESTIGATED

1. Unknown.

F. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

The Menasha City Hall/Fire Station is adjacent to the John Marx House (HABS No. WI-305) which was in the footprint of a three-story office building completed in October 1987. It is currently overlooking the new Menasha Marina which was part of the office building project and jointly referred to as the Menasha Harbor Development Project. Originally the project envisioned the necessity to demolish the Fire Station as part of this project. The project was altered to provide for the rehabilitation of the Menasha City Hall/Fire Station. Despite marketing efforts to attract private renovation as called for in the "Memorandum of Agreement" pursuant to the Corps of Engineer's permit and compliance procedure under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, we have been unsuccessful to date.

The building is now constituting a public hazard in that the roof is badly deteriorated and the rear wing walls are collapsing due to spalling and water-freeze damage. It is eminent that we obtain permission to pro-

ceed with demolition at this time.

Prepared by Don Novak, Director

Community Development

City of Menasha

May 16, 1988

G. FOOTNOTES

1. Adams, Peter James, The Menasha City Hall/Fire Station Nomination,
National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, 1980.
2. Ibid., #8. Significance.
3. Ibid., #7. Description.
4. Ibid., #7. Description.
5. Ibid., #7. Description.
6. Ibid., #7. Description.
7. Ibid., #7. Description, p. 2.
8. Ibid., #8. Significance.
9. Ibid., #7. Description.
10. Ibid., #7. Description.
11. Ibid., #7. Description.